

## **The Chamber of Secrets**

**Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or anything related to him/it.**

**A/N: Heh...here I am. The beginning of the second one. I am here to assure you that this will not be like the first one where I had to remain so cannon that it was nearly the book all over again. Now, however, I have made significant changes although the really big plot points such as Dobby and the Basilisk will remain intact. Thank you for bearing with me with the wait and I hope you enjoy yourselves.**

**Also, I've been getting a lot of complaints as to why Harry didn't get a letter and didn't attend Hogwarts last year. Honestly, folks, I thought you were smarter than that. If Harry is a year younger than Dudley, he must, therefore, be a year younger than Kate. That means he should be in the same year as Ginny. Thus, he starts Hogwarts this year.**

**OoOoOoOoOoOoOo**

### **Chapter One: The Move**

The room was empty and dark, with only the dim early morning light penetrating inside. Two smallish lumps on the ground could be made out in the dim lighting, neither moving. Several minutes passed and the sun rose tentatively over the horizon. A beam of the golden sunlight shone through the window and bravely illuminated the dull room.

The walls were bare, but obviously cleaned meticulously. The carpeted floor looked worn but had been vacuumed very recently. The dull grayish carpet wasn't all that special to look at but one of the two "lumps" of earlier was beginning to stir as the sunlight warmed it.

A soft groan broke the silence of the morning and a small, pale hand emerged from the lump followed by an arm which stretched out as far as it could reach and the lump yawned audibly. The lump shifted and began to rise, only to fall back to the dull carpet.

In its place, a small, pale girl rose, rubbing her eyes sleepily with the backs of small fists. Another yawn struck the girl, causing her to stretch her arms out again with her eyes closed tight. Her arms fell back to the lump she'd been sleeping in while she smacked her lips several times and opened her eyes.

Bright green emerald eyes looked blurrily around the room before falling on the second lump lying next to her that seemed rather content to continue to lie there. A mischievous grin had spread across the girl's face at the sight of the second lump and she rose shakily to her feet. She stumbled for a moment and nearly tripped over her own lumpy sleeping device but caught herself before she fell. Her tangled mass of raven tresses fell over her shoulders, which she gracelessly flipped back, revealing a lightning bolt shaped scar on her forehead.

With silent movements, she closed the distance to the second lump and grinned. The green eyed girl waited for a moment as if daring the lump to move. It didn't. With one final grin, the girl pounced on the lump screaming:

"HARRY!"

"ARG!"

A pair of skinny arms tried to push the girl off, but she'd already gotten a grip on the lump and was attacking it mercilessly. Tickling really.

"Ahaha!—Kate! Stop!—Ahaha!—I—Ahaha!—I GIVE!" the lump said while trying to speak through its own laughter.

The girl, Katherine Potter, more recently known as Kate Offill, sat back and smiled sweetly as the lump tried to sit up.

"What's wrong, Harry? A little ticklish?" she asked.

"Humph!" was all she got in response.

"Aw...c'mon, Harry. Don't be such a sourpuss," said Kate.

"M'not a sourpuss," the lump named Harry replied. "M'sleepy. Go wake up Dad..."

"No need for that," an amused voice said from the next room.

"DAD!"

The grown man found himself on the receiving end of a small girl's unbelievably powerful hug.

"Morning, kiddo," the man replied, smiling gently down at her while ruffling her hair fondly.

"Dad..." Kate complained with a smile on her face. It had barely been a month since she had returned from Hogwarts to discover Mitchell Offill had adopted her. It hadn't taken long for the two "cousins" to begin to call Mitchell "Dad" as it felt so good and so natural. The fact was, though, the three of them really hadn't had the time to spend together as a family.

When they'd arrived from King's Cross a month earlier in Mitchell's rickety looking car at the decrepit looking apartment complex, he was extremely apologetic about the poor accommodations of his small apartment, and said that he really didn't spend all that much money on himself. He confessed that he'd been looking for a house in the suburbs ever since he'd adopted Harry and had just found one before term ended.

To Kate and Harry, however, it was the most wonderful place in the world for the sole purpose that it was their home. However, they needed to move all the things from the apartment to the house, which, although it wasn't much, it would still take some doing. It was made easier when Mitchell got some friends from his work to help.

The month of July had been devoted to moving things from the apartment to the house and acquiring the furniture that Mitchell didn't have. It was fun to go around, looking at the ridiculous things that were available for the "modern household." Mitchell had claimed they were on a tight budget and couldn't afford many of the things that would make life a bit easier for themselves when Kate pointed out that she had mountains of gold sitting under London. It had taken a

bit of doing, but she convinced Mitchell to “borrow” some money from her, although she had no intentions of letting her dad pay her back.

Now, at the end of July, the paper work was all situated and they were all moved out except for the small amount of little things they’d needed to stay in the apartment such as sleeping bags and a little bit of dishware.

Kate gave Mitchell one last hug and then pushed away from him to move toward the small kitchenette that she had worked in nearly everyday as she was the best cook in their little family. That was one of the few things she actually thanked the orphanage for teaching her.

Mitchell tried to stop her but she was already pulling out a pan and heating the stove. Light humming could be heard over the sizzling of bacon and eggs.

“Dad...” Harry spoke up, finally relenting that his stomach wouldn’t let him sleep with the delicious smells wafting through the apartment, “I thought you weren’t going to let Kate cook today.”

“I wasn’t,” Mitchell replied with a half smile, “she’s just real quick out of the blocks.” With that he shrugged and went to help—as much as he was allowed—with breakfast. Harry followed Mitchell in, only to be promptly thrown out of the kitchenette by his older “sister” when she complained it was too crowded for her to work.

Fifteen minutes, and many good smells later, Kate carefully brought out three steaming plates of eggs and bacon. Mitchell and Harry hastily set up several dinner trays in the living room area and several fold out chairs and all three of them dug into the delicious food.

It wasn’t until the ravenous girl finished eating did either of the other two dare to interrupt.

“Kate,” said Mitchell, looking at his adopted daughter carefully.

“Mmm?” she responded, putting the last bite of egg into her mouth.

“Do you know what today is?”

Kate was silent for a long moment, thinking hard about what could be special about today. Her frown of concentration turned into a knowing smile. "We're finally moving today," she said, expecting that to be the correct answer.

"Well, yes...and no," Mitchell responded, grinning at the girl before him. She frowned again. *What could it be?* she thought frantically.

Mitchell sent a look to Harry, who grinned widely. As if they rehearsed it—which to an extent, they did—the two began to sing. "Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday dear Kate! Happy Birthday to you!"

Kate's eyes widened and then she began to blush a lovely bright red color. Harry and Mitchell grinned to each other, happy that they'd surprised the ever watchful Kate into blushing. What they hadn't expected, however, were the tears.

Harry and Mitchell watched in wonder as Kate's face went from slightly happy to extremely sad and deflated. Tears slid down her cheeks and soft sobs began to work through her small frame. Mitchell quickly sprang out of his chair and swept his daughter up into his arms.

"Hey...c'mon Kit, what's wrong?" he asked, rubbing her back soothingly as her small arms tried to pull him in as far as he would go.

"Th-they haven't...no let—" but Mitchell wasn't able to make sense of what she was saying. Her sentence was incomprehensible due to her crying and all Mitchell could do was rock her back and forth, uttering simple words of comfort.

Soon, however, Kate's sobbing subsided and she looked up at Mitchell and Harry with red, puffy eyes and gave them a watery smile.

"Thank you," she mumbled, hugging her adoptive father. "None of my friends have written. Not once."

She sounded remorseful, not angry, as if she were extremely hurt that her friends could have forgotten her so soon. It was a bit

troubling, really, as Ron had promised to invite her over to the Burrow—his house—for part of the summer.

The time after that little event was a bit of a blur of getting everything that was left in the apartment out to Mitchell's car. It wasn't a very hard task, as the largest things to take down were the folding chairs but the three of them went back through the apartment, making sure it was clean and orderly and that they weren't forgetting anything.

Their new house, incidentally, was located in Surrey, not far from Privet Drive. It was located on a street called Magnolia Road, a few streets away and very near the local park. It was a quaint little house, nothing too extravagant about it, although it did look depressingly like every other house on the street. Inside, however, was a warm and inviting atmosphere much unlike the Dursley's house had been a couple streets down.

The day, however, was not finished. Mitchell had invited several of his colleagues over to dinner to "commemorate the event" as he had said. Actually, it was more of him thanking everyone that had helped them move as they wouldn't have managed otherwise and, of course, to finish a certain girl's birthday celebration. Kate, knowing that neither Harry nor Mitchell would be able to make a satisfactory dinner, volunteered to do so but kept everyone out of the kitchen as she wanted things to be a surprise.

Pastas, salads, and meats were set everywhere around the kitchen, ready to be sent into the dinning room. Mitchell had come to the door at one point but was only awarded a view of Kate's face as she peered back at him.

"No peeking," she scolded and then closed the door. It had been fun ruling the kitchen. The guests were all wondering where exactly she was, and when Mitchell finally buckled down and told them, they were shocked to hear she was preparing dinner all on her own. His colleagues stopped worrying when he mentioned she was likely to cook anyone who went in there out of pure annoyance at being interrupted.

Eventually, the meal was ready, and the guests were hungry and eager to try the delicious smelling foods that were hidden in the

kitchen. Before that were to happen, however, Kate brought up one more minor delay.

"I have to go get cleaned up," she said as she came out of the kitchen. "You don't want me eating like this, do you?" She had a point. Bits of stray food covered her clothes and her hands, even though she cleaned them in the sink, had a strange mix of smells on them. The guests all agreed so she left everyone downstairs and headed up to get cleaned up.

Her first order of business was to wash everything she had on her, off. Simple enough. The shower took care of that problem and she made it easier on herself by shortening her hair to the spiky mess it tended to become when it got too short. Kate had been progressing in her abilities and could even change her hair style now along with some regular colors like red or brown and the one exceptional color of pink. In fact, she'd been practicing quite a bit at the apartment and had found it fun to surprise Harry and Mitchell with different Kate's each morning. She had to change back before anyone came over, but it was still fun.

With her brief washing through, Kate picked up the nearest towel, which just happened to be one of Mitchell's. It was so large that she just draped it around herself and it was still touching the floor. With a shake of her head, she dislodged most of the water in her hair and onto just about everything else in the bathroom. Kate grinned. That was the one thing she liked about short hair. Kate carefully pushed open the bathroom door and peeked out. No one. Satisfied, she made her way down the hall and into her room.

Kate's room was a smallish, square room with white walls and white carpet. Mitchell promised her he'd paint it when she went off to school so it wouldn't be so bland. A bed sat under the window which overlooked the front yard. A small dresser was at the foot of her bed and a desk was set opposite the window. A bookshelf, crammed with many heavy tomes, finished the room off. Her trunk was kept in the closet, which was barely big enough for that job.

None of that was what caused Kate to stop just as she was opening the door to her room. Everything was as she had left it. Her sheets a

messy pool at the foot of her bed, her pajamas scattered on the floor and several books lay open on her bed. What really caught her attention and caused her to stand, dripping slightly from her shower, was the smallish green creature sitting on her dresser, kicking its legs idly. It stopped moving the moment it saw Kate enter the room and stared at her with large, tennis ball like eyes.



## Chapter Two: Dobby's Warning

Kate was, for the most part, a normal, now twelve year old girl. She might have been a bit tom-boyish and she was a witch after all but she still wore skirts and whatnot, although the little creepy-crawlies didn't really scare her like they did most. She had the Orphanage to thank for that. So, it was quite the success to get her to scream out in surprise upon entering her own room.

Dimly, she was aware of the alarmed shouts from down the stairs and heavy footfalls of someone running up them, but most of her attention was still on the smallish green creature that had fallen off her dresser when she'd screamed. The creature recovered itself rather quickly and scrambled to its feet, only to fall into a low bow. It was at that time that Kate realized it was wearing what looked like a very dirty pillowcase with holes cut in it for its arms and legs.

Just outside her open door, where Kate was still standing, Mitchell came stumbling to a halt at the scene. First it was simply Kate standing there in an overly large towel but then his eyes looked over his daughter's head to the small green creature bowing in front of her. "Er..."

That seemed to snap Kate out of her shock and the...creature stood up straight again, fingering its pillowcase nervously. "Katherine Potter," it said reverently in a high, squeaky voice. "So much has Dobby heard about you, miss...so long has I wanted to meet you..." The creature bowed again to the shocked Kate while Mitchell stood behind her in an equally shocked state at hearing the small thing talk.

Kate, being the studious young witch that she was, had a good inkling what this creature might be. That in mind, it made it even harder for her to believe it had found its way into her bedroom. "Who are you?" she finally managed, her own voice a little higher pitched than normal.

"Dobby, miss. Dobby the house-elf," the green skinned creature replied.

"Oh..." she said faintly, trying to think of all the reasons why a house-elf would decide to come to her house, a muggle one, and sit on her dresser. And then there was the part about it wanting to meet her.

“Umm...Kate, what exactly is that?”

Kate jumped and looked over her shoulder. “Er, hi Dad. This is a house-elf,” she said, as if that might help him deal with the thought of the strange thing in her room. But her mind was working overtime at the moment and before Mitchell could say anything else, she was ushering him out of her room. “I think you should go keep everyone company downstairs,” she suggested, pushing him gently out the door. Just before she closed him out of her room she said, “I’ll be just a minute.”

The door shut with a soft click and Kate turned to look at the fidgeting house-elf. “Er...could you turn around, or something so I can change?” she asked. Dobby nodded frantically and whisked around while covering his large eyes with his hands.

Kate shook her head in confusion, the shock rapidly falling away to curiosity. A batch of clean, well hopefully clean, clothes lay on her bed, which she readily pulled on. She shook her head a little more violently this time, sending a few water droplets all around before lengthening it back to what it had been before her shower.

“So...er, Dobby,” she began, flopping down onto her bed and looking at the house-elf that was still cowering next to her dresser with his hands covering his eyes. Dobby jumped at being addressed. “Why exactly are you here?”

“Oh!” the elf exclaimed, whirling around and looking at her with wide eyes. “I is sorry miss! I is not telling you why I is here,” he all but wailed. Murmurs came from down stairs. It seemed as if Mitchell was trying to keep everything under control.

“Dobby! Shhh!” she told him, dashing over and all but clamping his mouth shut with her hand. “No yelling. There’re Muggles downstairs,” she told him while leading him over to her bed. “Now sit down and tell me why you’re here.”

Another bad move. He started crying and wailing once again. Kate moved quickly and clamped her hand over his mouth again, stifling the noise. “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to offend you—”

“Offend Dobby!” the elf choked out, successfully scrambling out of her hold. “Dobby has *never* been asked to sit down by a witch—like and *equal*—”

Kate grabbed at him again while shushing him. She got his arm and all but yanked him up onto her bed where she forcefully sat him down. She stared at him and he stared back at her in watery adoration. It was a little creepy.

“So...you were going to tell me why you are here,” Kate prompted, making sure she was ready to snatch him if he tried to do anything crazy. Dobby leaned toward her.

“Dobby heard,” he said hoarsely, “that Katherine Potter met the Dark Lord for a second time, just weeks ago...that Katherine Potter escaped *yet again*.”

Kate nodded uncomfortably and Dobby’s eyes widened even more, if that was possible.

“Ah, miss,” he gasped, the shining adoration in his eyes growing. “Katherine Potter is valiant and bold! She has braved so many dangers already! But Dobby has come to protect Katherine Potter, to warn her, even if he *does* have to shut his ears in the oven door later...*Katherine Potter must not go back to Hogwarts.*”

There was that confusing part in there about Dobby having to smash his ears in an oven that she didn’t understand but that’s not what had her gapping at the house-elf as if he’d just grown a second head.

“W-what! Why?” she demanded. “I have to go back! My cousin—brother’s starting this year, well at least I think he is, so I have to be there for him.” Okay, so maybe she wanted to go for her too, but saying she was going for Harry might mean a bit more.

“No, no, no,” Dobby squeaked, shaking his head so hard his ears flapped. “Katherine Potter must stay where it is safe. She is too great, too good, to lose. If Katherine Potter goes back to Hogwarts, she will be in mortal danger.”

“Why?” she repeated, fighting down the urge to scoff at the “mortal danger.”

“There is a plot, Katherine Potter. A plot to make most terrible things happen at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry this year,” he whispered, suddenly trembling all over. Dobby has known it for months, miss. Katherine Potter must not put herself in peril. She is too important, miss!”

“What terrible things? Who’s plotting them?”

Dobby made a weird choking noise and then banged his head frantically against the wall. “Bad Dobby! Bad Dobby!”

Kate stared in morbid fascination for a moment before her hand shot out and snatched him back away from her wall. He was looking a little cross-eyed. “What was that?” she demanded.

“Dobby almost spoke ill of his family, miss,” the groggy sounding elf replied. “Dobby had to punish himself.”

“So you can’t tell me?” she asked. Dobby shook his head. “Right...So why are you telling me? It’s not like I run the school or anything. You should be telling—” A thought shot through her like a wave of cold air. “This hasn’t got anything to do with Voldemort—”

Dobby moaned loudly and covered his ears. “Speak not the name, miss! Speak not the name!”

Kate sighed. He was acting like Ron. “Right, right. Sorry. I won’t say it again,” she promised. “So, does it have anything to do with You-Know-Who?” Dobby leaned closer to the wall. “Just shake your head or nod,” she added quickly. Dobby shook his head.

“Not He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, miss.” Dobby’s eyes widened again, as if he were trying to give her a hint. It wasn’t helping, unless Hogwarts was going to be attacked by a giant eyeball.

“He hasn’t got a brother, does he? Or a sister?” she asked randomly. You never knew...

Dobby shook his head again, his eyes getting even wider. Seriously, they were going to swallow his face soon.

“Then who could do something at Hogwarts?” she asked skeptically. “I mean, Dumbledore is always there. You do know who Dumbledore is, right?”

Dobby bowed his head.

“Albus Dumbledore is the greatest Headmaster Hogwarts has ever had. Dobby knows it, miss. Dobby has heard Dumbledore’s powers rival those of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named at the height of his strength. But, miss”—Dobby’s voice dropped to an urgent whisper—“there are powers Dumbledore doesn’t...powers no decent wizard...”

Without warning, Dobby leapt from her bed, grabbed her bedside lamp, and started beating himself over the head with it, letting out earsplitting yelps with every swing.

Kate sprang up and seized the lamp from him and picked up the dazed house-elf. He shook his head several times as she set him back on the bed. Dobby swayed there for a moment before he finally got his bearings.

“Dobby,” Kate said, turning toward the elf, “you still haven’t told me *why* I can’t go back to Hogwarts. If something bad is going to happen, I want to be there to help my friends.” Saying that last word hurt. A lot. None of her friends had written to her. It was like they’d forgotten all about her.

“Friends who don’t even *write* to Katherine Potter?” Dobby asked slyly.

Kate narrowed her eyes at the elf. “How did you know they weren’t writing me?” she asked suspiciously.

“Katherine Potter mustn’t be angry with Dobby. Dobby did it for the best—”

*“Have you been stopping my letters?”*

“Dobby has them here, miss,” said the elf. He produced a thick wad of envelopes, which Kate snatched, proving that snitches weren’t the only things that she could catch. Dobby looked a little shocked that she actually got them from him. She could make out Hermione’s neat writing, Fred and Georges unique block letters, Ron’s untidy chicken scratch, Hagrid’s scribbles, and a note that she strongly suspected came from Blaise Zabini.

Dobby blinked anxiously up at Kate.

“Katherine Potter mustn’t be angry...Dobby hoped...if Katherine Potter thought her friends had forgotten her...Katherine Potter might not want to go back to school, miss...”

Kate glared at the house-elf, causing him to blanch slightly.

“Will Katherine Potter promise she will not return to Hogwarts?” Dobby asked warily.

She shook her head violently. “I’m going back Dobby,” she told him, her tone daring him to try to stop her. He took up that challenge.

“Then Katherine Potter leaves Dobby no choice,” the elf said sadly.

Before she could do anything, he darted to her door, pulled it open, and dashed down the hall toward the stairs. Kate’s heart stopped. She was very sure the Ministry of Magic would be very unhappy if a whole room of Muggles saw a house-elf.

Without thinking, she dashed after him. She could hear worried voices in the sitting room and was glad Mitchell had convinced everyone to stay out of the kitchen as she saw a tiny green leg slip in. She landed roughly on the ground at the bottom of the stairs and stood up, waved to the people in the sitting room, stating she had one last thing to finish up in the kitchen, and darted in, closing the door behind her.

She stared in shock at the cake she had prepared for the dinner (it was a birthday celebration) floating above the kitchen floor. She looked around and saw Dobby crouched in a corner, his fingers pointed at the cake.

“That’s my cake...” she whispered. It had taken her forever to bake it.

“Katherine Potter must say she’s not going back to school—”

“Dobby...” she warned.

“Say it, miss.”

“No.”

Dobby gave her a tragic look. She didn’t know what that was all about. It wasn’t like she’d get in trouble for a splattered cake.

“Then Dobby must do it, miss, for Katherine Potter’s own good.”

With a crack like a whip, he vanished and the cake began its plummet. Quick as a fox, she darted forward and caught the tasty dessert in her arms. She smiled triumphantly and turned to place it back on the counter. Her feet tangled beneath her and she pitched forward. The cake flew out of her hands, splattering wonderfully against the wall.

Kate moaned at the mess falling gracelessly to the floor from her position on her stomach. Everyone no doubt heard the commotion and soon, the kitchen was filled with worried faces.

“Kiddo, you alright?” Mitchell asked her, kneeling beside her and helping her up.

“Yeah...I’m fine, Dad,” she replied, still staring at her cake. “My cake is gone...” she mumbled.

Mitchell looked like he was about to tell her something comforting when a sharp intake of air caught their attention. Everyone was staring as an owl flew in through the kitchen window and deposited a letter in Kate’s lap before flying off again.

Kate opened it mechanically as everyone stared, each of them with a different level of wonderment. It was not a letter she wanted to see on her birthday.

*Dear Miss Potter,*

*We have received intelligence that a Hover Charm was used at your place of residence this evening at twelve minutes past nine.*

*As you know, underage witches are not permitted to perform spells outside school, and further spellwork on your part may lead to expulsion from said school (Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875, Paragraph C).*

*We would also ask you to remember that any magical activity that risks notice by members of the non-magical community (Muggles) is a serious offense under section 13 of the International Confederation of Warlocks' Statute of Secrecy.*

*Enjoy your holidays!*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Mafalda Hopkirk*

## **IMPROPER USE OF MAGIC OFFICE**

*Ministry of Magic*

Kate groaned. "I can't believe it...stupid little bugger..." she mumbled. Mitchell, who had read over her shoulder, ushered everyone out of the room and told Harry to help Kate clean up the cake.

"So, what happened?" Harry asked as the two of them began to clean the mess. Kate sighed and began retelling what had happened when she'd gone upstairs. About Dobby blocking her letters and how he didn't want her to go to Hogwarts.

"You aren't going to listen to him, are you?" he asked worriedly.

"Of course not. I'll be there with you," she assured her brother. She like thinking like that...brother.

"What was with the letter?"



“That was the Ministry of Magic telling me that I got in trouble for Dobby using magic here,” Kate complained. “I think I’m going to write to them tomorrow so they know what happened.”

Harry nodded and went to retrieve a mop. Not long after, dinner was started and the whole incident was forgotten in place of the good food that was prepared. The birthday song was sung and gifts were given. All in all, it was a very exciting evening.

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The next day, after she read all of her friends’ worried letters, she responded to each of them, explaining that a mad house-elf had been intercepting her mail. She also sent a letter to Mafalda Hopkirk that explained exactly what had happened. Kate wondered if they’d believe her. She shrugged; it wasn’t as if she were going to go around practicing magic during the summer.

The days saw Kate in a rather good mood, now that she knew her friends hadn’t ignored her. She went back to practicing her Metamorphmagus talents more readily, gaining much more progress now that she wasn’t distracted. In fact, with all her summer work complete, she didn’t have much to do other than practice. Well, she did spend time out in the garden, as it reminded her so much of Herbology. It was nice to actually take care of plants that didn’t want to eat you.

It was on the third day after Dobby’s visit that something else extraordinary happened. While weeding the garden, Kate had stumbled across a small snake. It seemed young and shied away from her hand when she tried to touch it. “Don’t worry, I won’t hurt you,” she told it in a soothing voice. It seemed to work as the snake stopped retreating and seemed to stare at her before it approached her hand.

Its tongue tickled her fingers for a moment before the snake seemed to shrug. She didn’t know why she thought it shrugged, but it did. It slithered up into her hand and wrapped itself easily around her fingers. Kate smiled, wiped off the hand not holding the little snake, and headed into the house.

“Dad!” she called into the house. She heard footsteps coming down the stairs.

“Yes, Kit?” Mitchell asked as he came into the kitchen.

“Look what I found in the garden,” she said, walking toward him and holding out the snake for his inspection. Mitchell looked shocked for a moment, but the fact that the little snake was wrapped so loosely around her hand, he didn’t think it was dangerous.

“I didn’t know there were snakes in this neighborhood,” he said thoughtfully. “Why don’t you go put him back. I’m sure he’d like that more than sitting in your hand.”

Kate nodded, kissed her dad on the cheek, and dashed out of the house again. She knelt next to the garden again and set her hand on the ground. “Here you go. Back home safe and sound. Stay as long as you like,” she said happily. The little snake slid off her hand and back into the garden. She smiled and was about to continue with her work when she saw a little black furry thing coming from the side.

“Hazel, you leave that snake alone,” Kate said to her cat. Hazel looked at her reproachfully but did as she was told and swatted at Kate’s hands for a while instead of attacking the snake.

An hour later, she was done weeding for the day and got up to leave.

“Thankssss.”

Kate jumped and looked around, holding Hazel tightly to her chest. Seeing no one around, she shrugged and headed back inside to eat a late lunch.

Inside was an extatic Harry holding a thick letter addressed in emerald green ink. *Finally*, she thought. But perhaps they decided to send letters later this year. She’d been a bit worried that Harry wouldn’t get one.

## Chapter Three: The Burrow

*Dear Miss Potter,*

*We are sorry for the inconvenience and would like you to know the charge has been purged from your record. Upon further investigation of the night in question, it is clear a house-elf was indeed present at your residence. Again, we apologize for the misunderstanding.*

*Enjoy your holidays,*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Mafalda Hopkirk*

### IMPROPER USE OF MAGIC OFFICE

*Ministry of Magic*

Kate smiled at the letter and folded it up carefully before setting it on her desk. "That's that," she said with finality, brushing her hands together. She stood up from her desk, her pajamas rustling lightly in the early morning air, and pulled open her shades. There was still dew on the grass out front and the sun was just struggling to rise. *Perfect*, she thought as she pulled on one of her school cloaks and went downstairs to begin breakfast. Mitchell and Harry never woke up until they smelled eggs or bacon.

And soon enough, after the meal had begun to sizzle on the pans, there was stirring from up the stairs. More like a loud thump and a startled yell, but it brought around the same result. Harry was awake and excited (or at least that's what she thought the mad scrambling was about) as they were leaving for the Burrow that morning. She had received a letter from Mr. Weasley the night before telling her to expect him around eight to pick them up. He also invited Mitchell to come, but he had refused, saying he had work today.

Harry came stumbling down the stairs almost frantically, landing roughly before making his way into the kitchen and all but collapsing in his seat. Kate couldn't help but laugh at his half-awake expression while he tried to blink the sleep from his eyes.

“Don’ laugh,” he mumbled at her threateningly. She giggled some more but served him a platter of eggs and a couple sausage links. “That’s it?”

“No,” Kate said almost cheerfully, pointing her spatula at the simmering pot of hot cereal. “But you can get that on your own,” she told him before placing a second plate of eggs and sausage and a cup of coffee in front of a second seat at the table. Finally, she served herself and picked up a bowl of hot oatmeal.

“Excited?” she asked Harry. He paused with a forkful of eggs nearly to his mouth and nodded, his red hair flopping comically. Kate laughed again. “I can’t wait to see their faces when yet another red head appears at their house.”

Harry glared at her and resolutely stuck his fork in his mouth to keep from responding.

“Good morning.” Kate looked up to see Mitchell walk in, stifling a yawn while sitting at the only available chair.

“Morning Dad,” she said cheerfully. He looked at her with one eye and shook his head with a smile.

“You’re far too awake for this time of morning,” he said, taking a sip of his coffee. “And you’re psychic.”

“Nah, you’re just predictable,” Kate assured him. He grinned and began to eat. The meal was over quickly, owing to the fact that two small children with outrageously large appetites were at the table. Soon, though, they were all getting ready for the day; Kate packing her trunk, Harry putting his clothes into a bag, and Mitchell drinking more coffee.

At around seven thirty, Mitchell left for work and bid each of them farewell, saying he’d see them for Christmas. The two youngsters agreed and waved to him as his car pulled away down the street before heading inside. There they sat on Kate’s trunk, watching the clock tick closer to eight. After ten minutes of sitting, Kate let out a frustrated sigh.

“Hey, Harry, can I see your letter?”

“Sure.” He handed it to her. The envelope wasn’t wrinkled and the wax seal on the back had barely been broken.

“You know, we get one every year,” she told him, holding in her giggles. “You don’t need to keep them.”

Harry shuffled with embarrassment, his entire face glowing a spectacular color of red. “Ah, don’t worry,” she told him, “I’ve still got mine.”

He grinned at that but remained silent. *Maybe he’s a bit nervous*, she thought as she flipped the envelope over to look at what she had wanted to see in the first place. The first thing she had noticed about his letter when it had arrived.

*Mr. H. Offill*

*The Second Bedroom on the Left*

*27 Magnolia Road*

*Little Whinging*

*Surrey*

“I wonder if my name changed in the Hogwarts records,” she mused idly, handing Harry his letter back to wait in silence. Kate was disturbed briefly by Hazel jumping onto her lap. She smiled at the kitten and pet her briefly before setting it on her head. Hazel purred softly into the silence as they waited.

They didn’t have to wait much longer. At five minutes till eight, there was a strange sound, like a big rush of air just outside their front door. Silence engulfed them for a moment before there was an almost tentative knock on the door. Harry looked at Kate and she sighed, standing up and moving toward the door. She was just going to open the door when the doorbell rang. Not just rang, but someone was holding their finger on the button, letting the annoying sound permeate through the house.

Kate gave Harry a confused look and then opened the door. On the other side, still holding the doorbell button down was a thin man who was going bald but still had shockingly bright red hair. This could be none other than Mr. Weasley. Fred and George had warned her that their dad was crazy about muggle things. The fact that he was wearing robes was another give away.

“Erm...Mr. Weasley?”

He jumped and looked at her oddly, his eyes going from hers to her forehead and back again like every other person that had met her. Thankfully, he didn't shout out the usual “Katherine Potter!” upon seeing her.

“Good morning!” he said nicely enough in return. “All ready to go, I hope.”

She nodded. “Would you like to come inside?” Mr. Weasley looked ecstatic but then frowned and shook his head.

“No, no, better not. We must be going,” he said briskly. She looked around for his car or even a broom. Nothing. “Well, come on then. Hop to it. That's it.” Kate and Harry dragged her trunk outside, Harry's bag of clothes stacked on top. “Ah, this must be your cousin—”

“Brother,” Kate and Harry corrected him automatically. Mr. Weasley looked shocked for a moment before nodding.

“Ah, yes. I believe Fred and George told me about it. Must have forgotten. Never mind.” He produced a flattened rubber ball from his robes. “Why don't you two grab hold of this and we'll be on our way.”

Harry looked skeptical that a flat rubber ball could take them anywhere so Kate explained. “It's a portkey, Harry. It's okay, I've used one before.”

“Have you?” Mr. Weasley asked in surprise.

“Yeah. Hagrid took me to Diagon Alley with one.”

“Ah, of course. Wouldn’t fit on the busses, I suppose,” he mused before he shook his head and smiled at them. “It’s perfectly safe, Harry.”

“I guess...” he said and tentatively touched the ball. He looked a bit disappointed that nothing happened. Kate grinned and put her own finger on the ball and grabbed her trunk and Harry’s bag while Harry picked up Hedwig’s cage.

“Don’t worry, it’s exciting enough,” she assured him. “Just don’t fall over at the end.”

“Good advice,” Mr. Weasley mentioned while pulling out his wand. “Well, here we go. On three.” He raised his wand. “One, two, three!” As he said three, he tapped the ball. The familiar and slightly uncomfortable pull behind her navel yanked her from the ground and they were whisked away in a rush of wind and color.

OoOoOoOoOoOoOoOoOo

The whirling colors and rushing wind stopped suddenly and the ground seemed to melt into view. Just like the last time she had used a portkey, Kate found herself toppling over with the force of the landing, but this time there was no Hagrid to catch her. A loud yowl from Hazel told her that her kitten didn’t care much for the mode of travel either. She heard a scrambling to her left; giving her the relief that Harry wasn’t any better at it than she was. Mr. Weasley was chuckling merrily.

“Don’t worry, you’ll get used to that soon enough,” he told them as he hoisted Harry to his feet. Kate scrambled to her own and scooped up a disheveled looking Hazel who was in desperate need of some consoling. Mr. Weasley picked up one handle of Kate’s trunk and gestured behind them.

Kate and Harry turned around and grinned at the house before them.

It looked as though it had once been a large stone pigpen, but extra rooms had been added here and there until it was several stories high and so crooked it looked as though it were held up by magic (which, Kate thought, it probably was). Four or five chimneys were

perched on top of the red roof. A lopsided sign stuck in the ground near the entrance read, THE BURROW. Around the front door lay a jumble of rubber boots and a very rusty cauldron. Several fat brown chickens were pecking their way around the yard.

“Wow...” Harry said, staring at the house in undisguised awe.

“No kidding.”

Mr. Weasley smiled broadly at the both of them and pushed them forward ever so slightly. “Hurry up now. Molly’ll be wanting to greet you.”

The three walked toward the house, Harry carrying his bag of clothes, Mr. Weasley dragging along Kate’s trunk, and Kate petting a still fretful Hazel as well as carrying Hedwig’s cage. There was a shout from inside and the front door burst open. Fred and George ran pell-mell toward them, grinning from ear to ear.

“You’re here!” cried Fred as he swept her up into a hug.

“Finally, we can begin the planning!” George echoed, snatching her from Fred and repeating the hug while adding a little spin. Kate couldn’t help but laugh at their antics.

“Okay, George, put me down!” George set her down next to a curious and slightly shy Harry and a heartily laughing Mr. Weasley. “Thank you.”

Fred and George bowed deeply and then came back up, looking questioningly at Harry. “So, who’s this then?”

“I thought there world was out of red heads.”

“This is Harry, my *brother*,” she told them, stressing the word ever so slightly. “Harry, this is Fred,” —she pointed vaguely at one of the twins— “and this is George,” she waved toward the other one.

“Wrong!”



“I’m Fred and he’s George!” the twins chorused, pointing at each other

“Whatever.” Kate rolled her eyes. “Just guess with these two. They’ll point you right in the end,” she advised Harry.

The twins moved forward and began pumping both of Harry’s arms.

“So good to meet—”

“—dear Katherine’s brother—”

“—she’s told us so much about you!”

While Fred, George, and Harry were greeting each other, Mr. Weasley had gone inside and apparently told Mrs. Weasley they were out there.

“Fred! George! Stop pestering the boy and let them come inside!” Mrs. Weasley smiled warmly at both Kate and Harry as they walked into the house. If the outside had been good, the inside was amazing.

The moment they stepped into the house it seemed like an almost palpable feeling of home-ness settled over them. Just inside there was a room with comfortable looking couches and a slightly scorched table (probably from Exploding Snap). Pictures of the various Weasley’s adorned almost every available wall surface. A set of stairs was set in the wall to the left and to the right was a large fireplace over which held what had to be the best clock in the entire world.

Instead of numbers around the face, it had phrases like “At Home” or “At Work” or “Traveling.” There was even one that said “Mortal Peril” at the very top where the number twelve should have been. Where the three hands would have been on a normal clock, there were instead nine. Each one had a different name written on it as well as a small picture for each different member of the family. Seven of the hands were currently pointed to the “At Home” position while two others, Bill and Charlie, were pointed to “At Work.” As she watched, Charlie’s hand flicked over to “Mortal Peril” for a moment, then to “Traveling” and quickly back to “At Work” again. She remembered

Charlie worked with dragons and shivered at what must have almost happened.

“Would you two like some breakfast?” Kate twisted around to look at Mrs. Weasley who was smiling at both herself and Harry warmly.

“Er...we already ate breakfast,” she said slowly, looking at Harry who nodded his affirmation.

“Really? Breakfast before nine o’ clock?” Mrs. Weasley asked, pointedly looking at both Fred and George.

“Ah, come on, mum!” Fred began.

“Just because Kate and Harry are freaks—”

“—doesn’t mean we have to be.”

Mrs. Weasley huffed and told both of her guests to make themselves at home and that she would go wake Ron and Ginny. She marched up the stairs and out of sight.

“Freaks?” Kate asked, glaring at the twins.

“Well, it is unnatural to be awake before nine,” George explained.

“Then how do you two survive at Hogwarts?”

Fred and George exchanged looks and grinned. “Magic!”

Kate rolled her eyes and looked over at Harry. “Never expect a serious answer out of them.” Harry nodded, taking in as much as possible about this new world he’d entered.

Pounding and distant yelling filtered down from upstairs. A loud bang resounded through the house.

“Ron’s up,” Fred said, looking thoughtfully up at the ceiling.

“He never has figured out how not to fall out of bed when Mum does that,” George continued, coming to stand next to his brother. The light patter of footsteps turned Kate’s gaze from the twins to the stairs.

A girl, about the same height as Kate, landed gracefully at the bottom of the stairs. With one small and slightly freckled hand she brushed away the red hair that had fallen in front of her face and peered blurrily around.

“What’s Mum waking us up so early for?” she mumbled, rubbing her eyes in the general direction of the twins.

“Ginny!” Fred nearly leapt forward and lifted her into an identical hug the twins had given Kate when she arrived.

“Morning, baby sister,” George said, ruffling her hair and plucking her out of Fred’s arms.

The twins’ greetings seemed to snap the youngest Weasley child into wakefulness. She glared at George menacingly. “George, put me down. Now,” she all but snarled at her older brother. Said twin swallowed nervously and gently put his sister on her feet, even going as far as brushing some unseen lint off her shoulder.

As this was going on, Kate and Harry looked at each other in wonder and then began to laugh, albeit quietly. Kate imagined it would be a very large hassle to live with the Weasley twins and she respected this Ginny in training them so well.

Of course, all of this respect was soon forgotten as George stepped aside so Ginny could see their guests. The girl let out a small “Eep!” that might have been something like a startled squeal of excitement or a really weak burp. It was hard to tell.

Fred jumped in as if the strange noise hadn’t happened.

“Kate, this is our dear and beloved little sister, Ginny,” he said, gesturing toward the red head who was looking at her in wonder.

“Ginnikins,” George picked up, stepping out of reach of his little sister, “this is Kate Potter, our esteemed partner in crime and comrade in the war against rules.”

The use of the obviously hated nick name seemed to snap Ginny out of her trance of surprise and, for lack of a better phrase, hero worship.

Kate smiled at her and spoke up just as Ginny was about the slap George silly.

“Hello.”

That was enough to throw her off her rampage against the twins as she turned to look at the recently forgotten guests. “Er...hi,” Ginny responded shyly, shuffling her slipper-ed feet. Her gaze was a bit discomfoting but Kate shrugged it off. She had to deal with that kind of thing all last year.

Fortunately, the awkwardness between the two girls was broken by the arrival of Mrs. Weasley. “Ah, Ginny! I forgot to tell you upstairs, but Katherine will be staying in your room. Harry, dear, you will be up with Ron. He’ll be down in a moment.”

Ginny looked horrified and excited at the same time. She probably would have grabbed Kate’s hand and dragged her up to her room if Mrs. Weasley hadn’t mentioned starting breakfast and asking for Ginny’s help. As she retreated, she called to the twins to de-gnome the garden before breakfast. Kate looked at the twins who scuffed their feet against the floor and shuffled toward the back door and then looked toward the kitchen.

“I think I’ll go help with breakfast,” she told Harry.

“And I’ll go help Fred and George with the...er, de-gnoming?” he said awkwardly before following the twins out the back door.

Kate smiled and shook her head at her younger brother. Even something as simple as de-gnoming would pique his interest about magic. After the door closed, Kate turned toward the kitchen. “Mrs. Weasley?” she asked tentatively. The woman turned to look at her, smiling brightly. “I’d like to help.”

“Oh, there’s no need, dear,” the woman told her.

“No really. I always make breakfast and diner for Harry and Dad,” Kate insisted, stepping into the kitchen.

“Well...alright.” Mrs. Weasley sounded reluctant. Kate supposed she didn’t want her guest helping with the house work.

Mrs. Weasley directed her to help Ginny over at one end of the kitchen while she began waving her wand around, putting dishes together faster than Kate thought possible.

“Hi,” Kate greeted Ginny again. “Want me to get the bacon and sausage?”

Ginny had been staring at her as she walked over but then smiled brightly and nodded. “Sure,” she said, moving over and opening the ice box and handing Kate the meats while pulling out dozens of eggs. Kate took the cold meat and turned to the stove. Well, she guessed it was a stove as that was what it looked like.

“Er...how does this work?” she asked as she picked one of the many skillets from the counter and set it on the stove.

Ginny giggled. “I forgot, you’re from a muggle home, aren’t you?” Kate nodded. “It works like this. Those are the heat pads,” she said, gesturing to the many round circles on the stove top. That was the last bit of information she felt was familiar. For the next five minutes, Ginny explained the overly complicated system of working a magical stove properly.

Kate stared at her incredulously. “Wouldn’t it be easier just to use little knobs or dials for each pad? Honestly, the muggle version is a lot less complicated.”

“Really?” Ginny asked excitedly. “I’ve never seen a muggle stove! How does it work?”

As the two girls cooked they discussed the various kitchen appliances for the muggle and magical household. Soon, they were laughing heartily, telling stories about their time in kitchens and life in general. Kate left out the horribleness of the Orphanage, deciding Ginny didn’t really need to know that, especially on their first day as friends.

The smells of breakfast cooking seemed to be enough to wake up the rest of the inhabitants of the house as Ron showed himself not a

minute after the table had been set. Percy strutted down the stairs, his Prefect badge displayed prominently on his sweater and Harry, Fred, and George came inside, laughing like maniacs.

Kate and Ginny sat next to each other, their conversation from the kitchen drifting toward their two different worlds in general. Mr. Weasley walked by them to find his seat but was stopped in his tracks when Kate said the word “electricity.” Without warning he sat down right next to her and began bombarding her with questions about the muggle world, most of them awfully misguided. When he mentioned his wife thinking him crazy for collecting plugs, Kate couldn’t help but agree with her.

All in all, it was a different and good experience to have a meal with so many people that were so very nice. Harry looked uncomfortable at first, but soon he was being explained to by Fred, George, and Ron about what exactly Quidditch was and expressed his eagerness to begin flying at once. Mrs. Weasley forbade her three sons from taking Harry flying as he would learn at Hogwarts.

After breakfast was finished, Mrs. Weasley banished the dishes to clean themselves in the kitchen.

“Ginny, Ron, why don’t you show Kate and Harry where they will be sleeping.”

Ginny smiled brightly and tugged at Kate’s hand, eager to get her upstairs. Kate stood and looked around for her trunk but it appeared as if Mr. Weasley had lugged it upstairs already. After scooping up a rather upset and ignored Hazel, she followed Ginny up to her room. They came off the stairs on the third floor and Ginny opened her door wide with a grin.

Inside the walls were painted a light blue, although in some places the paint was faded letting the wall show its face. A desk sat under the one window in her room and next to it was a tall mirror. On the desks other side was a comfortable looking bed covered in blue blankets that stretched halfway down the wall it was flush against. At the foot of what Kate took to be Ginny’s bed was another, identical one covered in glaring orange sheets.

Ginny winced as she looked at Kate's bed. "Those are some of Ron's old blankets," she explained. Kate giggled and concentrated for a second. Her hair and eyes changed colors to match the painfully orange bed spread. Ginny gasped.

"Wow! How'd you do that?" she demanded.

Kate smiled and began the not so lengthy, but highly confusing explanation of her power as a Metamorphmagus. Ginny was a good audience and didn't ask stupid questions. After the explanation, Ginny was wearing a grin that would have been a common occurrence on Fred or George. Kate liked that grin.

"Oh, we can have so much fun with this," the two said together, both of them grinning madly at the other. Soon, the discussion was on about how best to utilize this unique ability.

## Chapter Four: At Flourish and Blotts

The following week was spent in much secrecy between the two girls as they thought of various uses for Kate's ability. First, they decided to simply have her imitate Ginny's appearance to play a little prank on the rest of the Weasleys. Extremely childish? Yes. But they needed to start somewhere. Frankly, it was easier said than done. Kate hadn't the faintest clue on what to do with a change like that. She tried to remember what the book she had borrowed in Diagon Alley had said about the subject but she just couldn't bring it up.

Ginny wasn't so worried about it and simply said it would be fun to practice (or watch in her case). It was hard at first, changing herself so much. It took a lot of concentration and with the combination of explosions from Fred and George's room to the clanging of pipes in the attic (there was a ghoul up there apparently), Kate found it very hard to concentrate at all. But, after a week of being locked away from the rest of the house for hours on end, she finally got it down. She may not have been identical to Ginny down to the last freckle but it was close; very close. Close enough, Ginny had said, that none of her family would be able to tell them apart.

It was on a sunny morning that the two girls, Kate dressed in some of Ginny's clothes, descended the stairs and into the kitchen. Mrs. Weasley was bustling around preparing breakfast like she did every morning. And, like every morning since Kate arrived, she and Ginny slipped in to help.

"Good morning Ginny, Kate," Mrs. Weasley said, not turning to look at them. They grinned at each other and then turned back to Mrs. Weasley with innocent faces.

"Morning Mum," they chorused, moving about as if everything were completely normal. Mrs. Weasley turned around sharply and dropped the spoon she had been holding. The two smiled brightly and proceeded to scramble the mass amount of eggs required for each breakfast.

"What did the twins do this time?" Mrs. Weasley asked warily.



They looked at each other, confusion etched on their faces. "Nothing," they said together, turning back to the eggs to hide their grins. Mrs. Weasley sighed in exasperation, muttered "too much," and scooped up her fallen spoon. She dutifully went back to cooking and tried to ignore the new set of twins occupying her kitchen although she did catch the occasional giggle from the two and couldn't help a smile of her own from touching her lips.

Eventually, after the breakfast was made and laid out on the table, the rest of the house seemed to wake up. Both Ginnys were serving themselves food when Fred and George stumbled into the kitchen in pajamas and with ruffled hair. They yawned a good morning and flumped down across the table from the two girls.

"Good morning," they greeted together, fighting down the smiles that were threatening to appear as they waited expectantly for their reactions.

George looked up first and blinked blurrily at them. "Hey Fred," he mumbled, rubbing his eyes with one hand and prodding his twin with the other. "Are there two Ginnys sitting across the table?" He gestured vaguely at them.

Fred looked up and repeated the blurry blinking. He rubbed his eyes as well. Both twins stared at them for a long while. The two girls stared back. It continued like that until both girls smiled brightly.

"Merlin, she's multiplying!" Fred cried, his brain finally kicking into gear as he tumbled out of his seat. George took one last look at them before he burst into loud laughter. He tried to pull his brother up but he was laughing so hard he simply joined him on the ground. Fred started laughing too and Mrs. Weasley chuckled softly from her vantage point in the kitchen. The Ginnys gave each other a high-five.

A few minutes later, Fred and George were back up again, congratulating the both of them but firmly saying they wouldn't have been so surprised if they hadn't been so tired. A loud groan and growl drew everyone's attention to the entrance of Ron. He was holding his stomach with one arm and shuffling slightly toward the table. One of the two girls shrank back a little, eyeing the redheaded boy as he

slumped into a chair and piled food onto his plate. He glanced up, barely blinking at the extra Ginny sitting at the table.

"Where's Kate?" he asked. No one answered him so he began to eat.

The same Ginny that shrank back groaned softly. Ron had been having these weird lapses in concentration ever since Kate had come to the Burrow. When he saw her at meals, he was prone to knock things over or spill his drink or, the most notable and most teased incident, plunk his elbow in a dish of butter. Ginny had mentioned he had been talking about her a lot before she came over. Kate was afraid that the one month lapse of contact had somehow degraded Ron back to crushing on her.

Harry showed himself moments later, grinning as he walked down that stairs. He glanced once at the two identical girls and then looked away, looking like he was fighting off laughter. The girls grinned. Harry had caught them in the act of practicing so they'd informed him about their little plan. He had promised not to tell but had occasionally come in to keep Ginny company as Kate practiced.

The girls scooted aside a bit and gestured for him to sit next to them. It was then that Mrs. Weasley entered the room carrying a large bundle of letters. "Letters from school," she announced, passing them out to the children. She simply placed both Ginny's and Kate's in front of the twin girls instead of trying to figure them out.

One of them fidgeted and then sighed loudly, drawing the attention of everyone at the table, including Ron who just noticed he had two sisters. "You know, it's not any fun to do this if you simply act normally after the first look," she said in exasperation. Her twin nodded.

"Well, you see, when poor souls are forced to live with us," Fred began, gesturing to his brother.

"They become accustomed to sudden shocks."

"It's the curse of the Weasley Twins."

"We hardened our family against outside harm," George said nobly.

"That's not fair," Kate pouted while her hair darkened to black, her eyes brightened to green, and her features seemed to melt into her original face.

"It was a good one though. You got Fred here," George encouraged. Kate ignored him and scooped up her letter as did Ginny.

*Miss K. Potter*

*Ginevra's Bedroom*

*The Burrow*

*Ottery St. Catchpole*

Kate felt a little disappointed that she was still a "Potter" to the wizarding world. She supposed it was to be expected. After all, most wizards didn't mingle with muggles for long periods of time and certainly not long enough to find adoption records. But that didn't stop her from wondering why Harry's was addressed as Offill instead of Dursley. She shrugged as she browsed the standard greetings part and flipped to the required equipment. She was just taking a sip of pumpkin juice when she noticed the long line of Lockhart books.

"You have got to be kidding me!" she spluttered loudly, spraying her booklist with juice. Everyone looked at her. *Who assigns Lockhart books to students?* she asked herself. She waved her soggy booklist to explain her outburst to everyone that was staring at her.

Fred and George nodded in understanding. Well, she thought it was understanding. "Must be a witch this year," Fred joked.

"What's so bad about Lockhart's books?" Ginny asked curiously, peering at her slightly longer first year list.

"I've read a couple of them," Kate confessed. "When I was staying at Diagon Alley before first year. They're more like fanciful story books instead of school books," she complained. Mrs. Weasley looked like she wanted to argue. "I don't know how anyone expects us to actually *learn* from that rubbish."

Apparently, nobody knew what to say to that outburst as they went back to eating their breakfasts. A few minutes later, Percy walked into the kitchen. Kate had to force herself not to scoff at him with his prefect badge placed on his jumper. Did he think they needed reminding?

"Morning all," he said briskly. "Lovely day."

Kate rolled her eyes at Ginny who shrugged in return. Percy always acted like this, apparently. According to Ginny, he had a superiority complex. Kate watched as he sat down in the only remaining chair but leapt up immediately, pulling from underneath him a molting, gray feather duster—at least, that was what Kate thought it was, until she saw that it was breathing.

"Errol!" Ron exclaimed, taking the limp owl from Percy. "*Finally*—he's got Hermione's answer. I wrote her saying Dad had gone to pick you up." He carried the owl over to its perch but simply lay it down on the draining board. He came back with Hermione's letter and started to read it out loud:

*"Dear Ron, and Kate if you're there,"*

*"I received Kate's letter a couple minutes before yours arrived. Is it true that a house-elf was really blocking her letters? That seems very odd to me. I read that house-elves are bound to a certain family for their entire lives and can only do as ordered by a family member. Who do you think Dobby belonged to?"*

*"I'm very busy with school work, of course'—How can she be?" Ron asked in horror. "We're on vacation!—' and we're going to London next Wednesday to buy my new books. Why don't we meet in Diagon Alley? Let me know if you are but ask Kate if you can use her owl, Hedwig. I think yours might not make the journey."*

*"Love from, Hermione."*

"Well, that fits in nicely, we can go and get all your things then, too," Mrs. Weasley said, starting to clear up the table. As Kate and Ginny moved to help, Kate couldn't help but notice that Mrs. Weasley seemed a bit excited that they were going shopping on Wednesday.

When the table was cleared, she turned to the lot of them gathered in the sitting room. "What're you all up to today?"

Fred, George, and Ron had been asking Kate to go up the hill to play Quidditch. She had asked if they had invited Ginny. The three had told her uncomfortably that they'd never really taught Ginny how to fly, thinking it was too dangerous for their little sister. Kate, who, over the past week of living with said sister, discovered the youngest Weasley had been flying since she was six, declared that if Ginny didn't come, she wouldn't come. And that meant her Nimbus was staying inside.

The boys quickly agreed. Kate snagged Harry on the way out, telling him he would have to learn sometime. Once out at the little tree surrounded paddock, she offered her Nimbus to Ginny under the strict rules that she had to teach Harry how to fly before she could test it out. Ginny agreed readily and soon, Harry was standing next to the broom while she explained everything to him.

Kate, who had received the broom Ginny had brought up the hill (Bill's old one), began a fun, fast paced game of catch with some wild apples with the three Weasley boys. She had to really struggle at first, as Bill's broom was very old and had nowhere near the performance capabilities of her state of the art Nimbus.

The light conversation they had as they half watched Ginny teaching Harry how to properly mount the Nimbus and half tossed apples at each other (Fred and George sometimes tried to beam their targets in the head) turned to the booklist.

"Dunno how Mum and Dad are going to afford all our school stuff this year," said George after a while. "Five sets of Lockhart books! And Ginny needs a wand and everything..."

Kate was distracted enough by that comment to let an apple hurled by Fred to hit her in the head. "Oi! Sorry there, Kate. Thought you were paying attention!" She waved off his concern and continued their little game. She wondered if the Weasleys would let her help. Maybe if she bought the Lockhart books for them. They were rubbish anyway, why waste money on them?

--

Kate and Ginny were up bright and early on Wednesday, helping Mrs. Weasley prepare the bacon sandwiches that would constitute as their breakfast. After that, Mrs. Weasley left the girls to eat while she went to wake the rest of the house. Minutes later, the disheveled boys descended into the kitchen.

"I don't see how you two do it," George mumbled.

"You'll never see us waking up that early," Fred agreed.

Ron dropped one of his sandwiches on the ground and hastily bent to pick it up. While the boys were eating and Ron was blushing, Mrs. Weasley retrieved a flower pot from the mantel.

"We're running low, Arthur," she said. "We'll have to buy some more today..." After everyone finished eating their sandwiches, Mrs. Weasley ushered them all towards the fireplace. "Well, guests first! After you, dears."

She held out the flower pot to both Kate and Harry. Kate peered inside. At the bottom was a small amount of glittering green sand. She frowned at it for a moment, wondering what exactly she was supposed to do with it. She looked from the pot to the fireplace and back again.

"Oh, Floo powder!" she declared. Mrs. Weasley looked shocked at her outburst, clearly wondering why she had said such an obvious thing.

"She's never traveled by Floo powder," Fred spoke up.

"Never?" Mrs. Weasley asked. "But how did you get to Diagon Alley to buy your school things last year?"

"Hagrid took me with a portkey."

"Ah, yes, I remember Arthur telling me something about that. But, if it's your first time...maybe we should—"

"No, no! It's okay. I've read about it. You just throw that powder in the fire, step in, and say your destination, right?"

“That is the gist of it, yes, but—”

Kate dipped her hand into the flower pot and took a pinch of the sparkly powder out. She looked back at Mrs. Weasley, who didn't know what to say about Kate's knowledge of Floo travel.

“In the book it said you could take someone with you, is that true?”

Mrs. Weasley shook her head quickly before answering the question. “Of course, if you can fit two inside the fireplace.”

“Right, c'mon Harry,” she said, gesturing her nervous looking brother toward the fire. “Oh, it's perfectly alright, I know exactly what I'm doing,” she told him, grabbing his hand and yanking him next to her. “I just say ‘Diagon Alley,’ right?”

Mrs. Weasley and the rest nodded, although they looked apprehensive. Kate nodded and tossed the powder into the fire. It turned a brilliant green, the same color as the powder. She firmly guided Harry into the green flames.

“Deep breath,” she told him, taking one of her own. She'd read that taking a breath before you go in to shout your destination was the wisest idea to do so you wouldn't get a mouthful of ash. She pulled Harry into a tight hug, noting that he more than readily latched on as the flames licked harmlessly around their legs.

“Diagon Alley!” Kate cried clearly and off they went, spinning quickly through the emerald green flames. She squeezed her eyes shut against the spinning and passing fireplaces just as Harry did the same. A roaring noise like an enormous fire filled her ears. With an almighty lurch, the two fell to the ground in a tangle of legs and arms.

Kate coughed and quickly untangled herself from Harry before helping him up. She brushed the worst of the soot off his shoulders and grinned at him. “See, that wasn't so bad.” Harry merely groaned in response while Kate looked around. They were standing in the Leaky Cauldron. Tom the bartender waved at them in greeting but everyone else seemed to be ignoring them, as if two children falling out of the fireplace was completely normal...which it was.

Kate was just finishing her look around the pub when the fire roared behind her and she felt someone slam right into her back. She was tempted to greet the floor and thank it sarcastically for catching her fall but she didn't really want to give anyone outside of Hogwarts the idea that she was crazy.

"I'm sorry...er..." She flipped over onto her back and looked up. Ron was standing over her, red faced and trying to avoid her eyes, which she was glad for because she promptly rolled them.

"No problem, Ron. A little help would be nice though," she said, trying to ignore the fact that his face was glowing like the sun. He stretched out a shaky hand, which she grabbed to hoist herself up. "Thanks." Ron gurgled and went to sit on a nearby chair. Harry shot her a confused glance to which she answered with a shrug while she got out of the way of the Weasley spitting fireplace.

That turned out to be a very good idea as Fred, promptly followed by George, stepped out of the flames.

"You two made it," Fred told them unnecessarily.

"Mum was having a fit, thinking you two must have gotten out at the wrong grate or something," George continued, reflexively catching Ginny as she tumbled out of the fireplace.

"Thanks, George," Ginny said, gaining her feet and stepping away from the fire. Percy, Mr. Weasley, and then Mrs. Weasley came out moments later, all gracefully stepping out instead of falling. Mrs. Weasley immediately converged on Kate and Harry, her wand brandished and speaking in highly worried tones.

"Oh you poor dears! Could have been lost in the Floo," she said as she cleaned them quickly with a couple flicks of her wand. Kate looked past her and saw Fred and George roll their eyes and wink. Ginny gave her a look that stated she'd been on the receiving end of the "Worried" speech as well.

"—have lost an arm..." Mrs. Weasley was saying as she cleaned the soot off her children. Shortly after that, Kate and the rest found themselves being ushered quickly out the back door of the Leaky



Cauldron. It was then that Kate remembered that she wanted to talk to Mrs. Weasley about buying the Lockhart books.

“Gringotts first,” Mr. Weasley declared after opening the archway blocking off Diagon Alley. Kate glanced at Harry and grinned. His eyes were as wide as galleons. She had to push him into the alley before it closed up.

Diagon Alley was extremely crowded. People jostled each other with every step and it was all Kate could do to stay in contact with the Weasleys and Harry. It was like everyone had decided to beat some noon time rush at the same time, creating a big mess in the process. Fortunately, the gleaming white building of Gringotts was relatively calm in the sea of chaotic shopping.

As soon as her foot hit the bottom most step leading up toward the bank, someone called out to her.

“Kate!”

She jerked in surprise and looked down at her foot, one wild thought telling her the stair said her name. When she looked up, however, she saw a head of bushy hair and a couple of flailing arms waving at her. She grinned and bounded up the stairs, engulfing her friend in a hug. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw two people standing off to the side, looking around nervously.

“Are those your parents?” Kate asked curiously, pulling back and looking at the two obviously muggle people. Hermione nodded and dragged her over to meet them. Mr. and Mrs. Granger were extremely pleasant, although they did end up asking what dentist Kate saw as her teeth were impeccable. She didn’t have the heart to tell them that it was magic.

After quick introductions all around where the Grangers were subjected to Mr. Weasley’s Muggle fascination, the large group headed into Gringotts. Mr. Weasley went off with the Grangers to “help” them with their money transfer. Kate heard him badgering them about ball-point pens. The Grangers took this in stride and were readily explaining various Muggle odd ends.

Kate focused back on everyone else when Mrs. Weasley secured a goblin. She handed the goblin her rusty (did gold rust?) gold key as well as Kate's shiny one. Hagrid must have given it to her. Soon, a second goblin appeared to lead them all their vaults via the super-fast rail carts.

The first stop on the crazy ride was at the Weasley's vault. Mrs. Weasley opened the door and scooped up all four Galleons and a handful of Sickles and Knuts. Kate shifted uncomfortably in the cart next to Ginny and Harry, knowing very well that her vault probably had thousands, if not hundreds of thousands more galleons than the Weasleys had.

She fidgeted the entire way down to her vault, number two hundred and nine. The goblin opened her vault as soon as they stopped and Kate heard a couple of muffled gasps from behind her as she scooped up galleons into two bags. Thinking of how little money the Weasleys had to get school supplies with, Kate also filled a third bag while contemplating a way to make the proud family accept it.

On the way back up to the surface, she handed one of the bags to Harry as she squeezed into the cart, making sure to sit right next to Mrs. Weasley so she could catch her as they got off. The cart came to a jostling halt at the end of the track, prompting the windswept passengers to disembark. Kate stumbled out behind Mrs. Weasley and grabbed onto her arm in support and to keep her from going anywhere.

"What is it, dear?" the Weasley matron asked when Kate didn't release her arm.

The green eyed girl shifted uncomfortably, holding two bags of gold in her hands. Without much thought, she thrust one at Mrs. Weasley who looked properly shocked. It only took her a moment to gather her composure, however.

"Oh no, dear, that's your gold," she said, sounding as uncomfortable as Kate felt.

"But Mrs. Weasley, Lockhart's books are ridiculous and expensive. There should be enough to buy all of the sets you need without

worrying,” Kate said quickly, pushing the sack of gold into the woman’s hands. Okay, so she didn’t really know how much was in the bag, but she was pretty sure it could buy all five of the Weasley kids going to Hogwarts new supplies.

Mrs. Weasley began to protest but Kate cut her off with a pleading look. “Please Mrs. Weasley? I just want to help.” Kate couldn’t help but celebrate internally when the red haired woman melted and accepted the bag of gold, albeit reluctantly. She mumbled what sounded like an embarrassed thank you to which Kate grinned and skipped off to catch up with the rest of the waiting Weasleys and Hermione.

The group made their way out onto the front steps of Gringotts where Mrs. Weasley dispensed, to her husband’s and children’s surprise, a much larger amount of galleons than had been in their vault and, most likely, a larger amount than any other they had received in the past. Hermione gave Kate a knowing look, which she dutifully ignored, not wanting to draw attention to herself although Ginny was giving her a shrewd look as well.

After that, the group seemed to bleed away into the crowd with practiced ease. Percy pompously told everyone he had to buy some more quills, although no one believed him as he went in the completely wrong direction for that. Fred and George snuck off with Lee Jordan (who had appeared at some point) to Gambol and Japes, unbeknownst to Mrs. Weasley.

Mrs. Weasley attempted and failed to commandeer her daughter and instead accompanied Mr. Weasley and the Grangers to the Leaky Cauldron after telling everyone to meet at Flourish and Blotts in an hour. That left Kate, Harry, Ginny, Hermione, and Ron to wander around the Alley in search of their school supplies. The first stop was Madam Malkin’s where they were all sized for new robes, much to Ron’s astonishment.

The witch, Amy, who had helped her when she had first arrived at Diagon Alley the year before, greeted her pleasantly, asking how her first year had been. The two talked the entire time, mostly about Kate’s hectic year. In lulls in her conversation, Kate noticed Harry and

Ginny talking quietly to each other as they waited their turn to be fitted. Ron was red in the face from embarrassment as Madam Malkin pinned up his robes while talking to Hermione who was asking questions left and right.

The most entertaining bit of that afternoon was taking Harry, Ginny, and surprisingly Ron to get new wands. Ron had mumbled that his was a bit worn out. Kate and Hermione had to endure Mr. Ollivander's reminiscing about their wand purchases although he thankfully left out the fact that Kate's wand was related to Voldemort's. The wand testing didn't take nearly as long as her own had, even with the three getting wands.

After the three had effectively produced various colored sparks out of their chosen wands and paid for them, they made their way to Flourish and Blotts as their hour was almost up. Unfortunately, the thoughts of getting their books quickly were thrown out the window at the huge crowd jostling around outside the small bookstore as if everyone was trying to get inside at once. The reason for this made Kate groan and wish she had something to slam her head against and, surprisingly, made Hermione squeal in excitement.

GILDEROY LOCKHART

will be signing copies of his autobiography

*MAGICAL ME*

today 12:30 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

"We actually get to meet him!" Hermione continued to squeal, much to Kate's horror. "I mean, he's written almost the entire booklist!"

Kate was tempted to say something to her friend but resisted, opting on letting her read the books herself to figure out how useless they would be in the classroom. The five squeezed through the door, ignoring the jostling crowd, mostly witches. There was a line heading to the very back of the shop where he was signing his books.

With Kate and Hermione's expert help, they found their required books (Kate and Hermione got a few extra) and sneaked up in line to

where the Weasleys were standing with the Grangers. All of Lockhart's books were spread around him so they had no choice but to wait in line.

"Oh, there you are, good," Mrs. Weasley said. She sounded breathless and kept patting her hair. "We'll be able to see him in a minute..."

Gilderoy Lockhart came into view slowly, seated at a table surrounded by large pictures of his own face, all winking and flashing dazzlingly white teeth at the crowd. The real Lockhart was wearing robes of forget-me-not blue that exactly matched his eyes; his pointed wizard's hat was set at a jaunty angle on his wavy hair. Just the sight of him had Kate resisting the urge to gag. She didn't know why, but for some reason, she couldn't resist disliking the man the instant she saw him.

A short, irritable-looking man was dancing around taking photographs with a large black camera that emitted puffs of purple smoke with every blinding flash.

"Out of the way, there," he snarled at Ron, who was in the way of his backing up to take a better shot. "This is for the *Daily Prophet*—"

"Big deal," Ron muttered loudly. That was the most vociferous he had been all summer Kate noted. Unfortunately, he chose a rotten time to become loud again.

Gilderoy Lockhart heard him.

He looked up and saw Ron. His eyes flicked over the rest of the Weasleys, taking in the Grangers as well before they finally stopped on Kate. He stared, his eyes widening with disbelief. He leapt to his feet and shouted, "It *can't* be Katherine Potter!"

"Bugger..."

The crowd parted, whispering excitedly. Lockhart dived forward, intent on seizing Kate's arm to drag her to the front. With an alarmed yelp, she jumped back, avoiding Lockhart's lunge and causing the man to tumble to the ground. Laughter rippled through the small store.

Lockhart was undaunted, however, regaining his feet quickly and this time successfully dragging an extremely reluctant Kate behind the table he had been signing at.

The crowd applauded as Lockhart began to pump her arm up and down forcefully, never loosening his vice like grip that she was afraid was bruising her hand and wrist. The *Daily Prophet* photographer seemed to be going in overdrive, sending a constant stream of smoke wafting from his camera as well as blinding flash after blinding flash.

“Nice big smile, Katherine,” Lockhart said, through his own gleaming teeth. “Together, you and I are worth the front page.”

When Lockhart finally let go of her hand, she tried to duck back to the Weasleys. She almost succeeded but Lockhart seemed to have been expecting it as he quickly threw an arm around her shoulders and all but pinned her to his side. She shuddered violently.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” he called loudly, waving for quiet. “What and extraordinary moment this is! The perfect moment for me to make a little announcement I’ve been sitting on for some time!”

“When young Katherine here stepped into Flourish and Blotts today, she only wanted to buy my autobiography—which I shall be happy to present her now, free of charge—” The crowd applauded again. Kate fought the urge to stomp heavily on the man’s foot to make him release her. “She had *no idea*,” Lockhart continued, giving Kate a little shake, completely oblivious to her increasingly angry state, “that she would shortly be getting much, much more than my book, *Magical Me*. She and her schoolmates will, in fact, be getting the real magical me. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I have great pleasure and pride in announcing that this September, I will be taking up the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!”

The crowd cheered and clapped. The photographer began to snap pictures again. After the third blinding flash, Kate’s face had gone from extremely angry and embarrassed to overly innocent. For at the moment of the third flash, Kate had stopped fighting the urge to smash his foot with her own and slammed her heel down on Lockhart’s big toe. She could feel the snapping of bone through her

shoe, but no one else seemed to hear it over the excited chatter and explosions of the camera going off. Lockhart managed to keep from jumping up and down in pain but couldn't keep the look of complete pain off his face.

Kate gamely took the assorted works that was handed to her with the innocent look still on her face before slipping off toward Ginny, who was about as far away from the crowd as possible while still being in the store. She staggered slightly as she readjusted her grip on the heavy books and only just managed to dump the lot into Ginny's cauldron.

"I can't believe it," Kate complained, glaring over her shoulder at Lockhart, who was once again smiling at everyone and signing books, although he wasn't standing anymore.

"What did you do to him?" Ginny asked, letting her cauldron settle on the ground.

"I think I broke his toe."

"You *what?*"

Kate grinned sheepishly, her hair brightening slightly as she blushed. Ginny looked as though she was about to congratulate her but they were interrupted by the most unwanted voice in existence.

"Bet you loved that, didn't you, Potter?" Kate turned slowly to glare at Malfoy who was sneering at her, as usual.

"*Famous* Katherine Potter, can't even go into a *bookshop* without making the front page."

"You know, Malfoy, if you want my autograph, you just have to ask," Kate said smoothly.

"Wh—I...I don't want your autograph!"

"Oh, so it's Lockhart's you're after?" she asked, raising an eyebrow. A tint of humor gilded her voice.

Small pink splotches appeared on Malfoy's pale face. His eyes darted away from her green ones and found Ginny standing behind her, barely containing her own smile. He didn't seem to notice her new robes, cauldron, or school books. Malfoy looked as if he were about to say something quite nasty when two arms wrapped around his shoulders.

Kate and Ginny couldn't keep their grins concealed any longer as Fred and George both slung an arm around Malfoy.

"Drakikins!"

"We were wondering—"

"—when we'd see you!"

"We have so many—"

"—new things to test!"

Malfoy went pale...er as he gazed from one twin to the other, a fearful look in his eyes. Hermione and Ron showed up at that moment, both looking curiously at the situation. Kate wasn't sure what they were going to do to Malfoy, but she had every intention of watching it through to the end. However, Malfoy seemed to have a little bit of luck on his side as Mr. Weasley showed up at that moment.

"Fred! George! Let the boy go," he told them sternly. The twins reluctantly let the Slytherin out of their grasps and slipped over toward Kate and Ginny, never really turning their back on Malfoy.

"Well, well, well—Arthur Weasley."

All eyes turned to the newcomer.

"Lucius," Mr. Weasley responded coldly.

Mr. Malfoy's gaze traveled all along the group of them, clearly taking in the new clothing and school supplies. As if to confirm that everything was, indeed, new, he slipped Ginny's copy of *A Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration* out of her cauldron. Kate narrowed her eyes



into a glare and inconspicuously put her hand in her pocket, wrapping her fingers around her wand. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Mrs. Weasley, the Grangers, Percy, and Harry approaching from Lockhart's signing booth.

The tension between the two men was alarming and Kate suspected that the wrong word said from either side would result in some nasty consequences. And of course, Mr. Malfoy had to be the one to do it.

"Surely you couldn't have afforded this, Arthur," he said with a sneer, gesturing towards Ginny's new book. "Resorting to thievery, Weasley? And I thought your family could sink no lower—"

Kate and Ginny were swept aside and to the ground as Mr. Weasley threw himself at Mr. Malfoy. Ginny's cauldron landed with a loud thud next to them. Luckily, nothing fell too far as they would have had trouble distinguishing their books from the multitudes that rained down from above as Mr. Weasley drove Mr. Malfoy into a bookshelf.

"Get him, Dad!" yelled Fred and George simultaneously as Mrs. Weasley shrieked, "No, Arthur, no!"

The crowd stumbled back, away from the fight, knocking over more bookshelves in their carelessness. "Gentlemen, please—please!" cried the assistant who had been governing the flow of people traffic.

"Break it up, there, gents, break it up—" shouted a voice, quickly identified as Hagrid. He was wading through the sea of people toward the two brawling wizards. In an instant, he had pulled Mr. Weasley and Mr. Malfoy apart. Mr. Weasley had a cut lip and Mr. Malfoy had been hit in the eye by an *Encyclopedia of Toadstools*. He was still holding Ginny's Transfiguration book. He thrust it at her, nearly knocking her over, his eyes glittering with malice. He sneered nastily at all of them and then swept out of the shop with Draco close behind.

"Yeh should've ignored him, Arthur," Hagrid said, almost lifting Mr. Weasley off his feet as he straightened his robes. "Rotten ter the core, the whole family, everyone knows that—no Malfoy's worth listenin' ter—bad blood, that's what it is—come on now—let's get outta here."

The assistant looked as though he wanted to stop them leaving, but he barely came up to Hagrid's waist and seemed to think better of it. They hurried up the street, Kate and Ginny running behind with the refilled cauldron between them, listening to Mrs. Weasley scold her husband.

"A *fine* example to set for your children...*brawling* in public...*what* Gilderoy Lockhart must've thought—"

"He was pleased," Fred interjected, "Didn't you hear him as we were leaving? He was asking that bloke from the *Daily Prophet* if he'd be able to work the fight into his report—said it was all publicity—"

But it was a subdued group that headed back to the fireside in the Leaky Cauldron, where Kate, Harry, the Weasleys, and all their shopping would be traveling back to the Burrow using the Floo. They said good-bye to the Grangers, who were leaving the pub for the Muggle street on the other side; Mr. Weasley started to ask them how bus stops worked, but stopped quickly at the look on Mrs. Weasley's face.

Kate grinned as she, Harry, and Harry's trunk were whisked away in a rush of green flames.

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**A/N: Sheesh! These chapters are getting longer and longer! Sorry for the wait but I had a little bout of writer's block keeping this one locked up. I tried to alleviate it by writing some other things but it didn't really work. Anyway, there's your Chapter Four. I'll try to get the next one out soon but don't hold me to that.**